

REPORT of AD HOC COMMITTEE on RULING ELDER PARTICIPATION

Preface: The ad hoc committee on ruling elder participation was established to study the issue and recommend ways RE participation in the broader church courts could be fostered. This has been a perennial issue facing not only our presbytery but others as well, and is likewise an issue at the GA level. We would agree with Jason Heioloupas in his blog commenting on poor RE participation at the 2012 GA: "Presbyterianism only works as we participate in its courts. . . . Ruling Elder involvement is essential to the safeguarding of our denomination, its theology, and its practice."

Our committee is composed of the following members appointed by the moderator of the May meeting of PMV: Roger Collins TE, Bob Schwanebeck TE, Perry McCall TE, Bebo Elkin RE, Paul Adams RE, and Will Thompson RE, chairman.

The committee met: March 18, 25, April 8, May 20, and July 22. Nearly four hours were consumed by each meeting. All six members attended every meeting and minutes were kept.

Along with much discussion, the committee utilized personal interviews with various RE/TEs, and a survey was distributed to PMV's elders. Around 90 responses were returned. Based on this process and information, the committee offers the following:

Upon reflection this committee acknowledges that, by the mercies of God, we as a presbytery live and function in the midst of pleasant places relatively speaking. We have much to be grateful for—a presbytery committed to the Scriptures as our only rule of faith and practice, the Great Commission of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Reformed faith as expressed in our Westminster Standards. Because of these foundational principles and a desire to glorify and enjoy our God we seek to be faithful to Him in all we do. Thus our goal in offering these recommendations.

I. Leadership

Even though PMV acknowledges its commitment to the parity of the eldership, it should be noted that someone must lead; thus, the TE is "first among equals". However, Presbyterian elders too often live in the tension created by subconsciously submitting to a de facto three office view of the eldership, or even a prelatical view of church government in which TEs assume to themselves, or accept from the REs, an inordinately dominant role. Likewise REs subconsciously, or more overtly, delegate to our TE brothers those roles and responsibilities which Christ says belongs to REs in His church.

II. General Recommendations

1. That both the TEs and REs of PMV rethink the calling of elders and what

it means to be Presbyterian; and, that usually TEs are to take the role of leader as the first among equals in their sessions and congregations by discipling, encouraging, instructing, and exhorting each body in the nature of Presbyterianism, the nature of the sacred office of elder and its requirements, not only on a local level but in the broader church as well (i.e. presbytery and General Assembly). Furthermore, REs likewise should assume leadership in the exhorting and encouraging of other elders-ruling and teaching alike.

Vote count: 6-0

2. That both TEs and REs be encouraged to have ongoing discipling of current REs in their calling as elders and presbyters, and that future elder training would include the study of ecclesiology and polity. Suggested materials are: Guy Prentiss Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church* (P&R Publishing); David Dickson, *The Elder and His Work* (P&R Publishing); Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader* (P&R Publishing); John R. Sittema, *With a Shepherd's Heart* (Reformed Fellowship Inc.).

Vote count: 6-0

3. That TEs (or in the case of their absence, the Clerk of Session) be encouraged to inform their session of the White Book's contents, and particularly of pertinent issues to be handled at each meeting of presbytery.

Vote count: 6-0

4. That TEs instruct their REs in at least basic Robert's Rules of Order and the BCO.

Vote count: 6-0

5. That this ad hoc committee (see recommendation 15) prepare a packet of information regarding the work of presbytery which would be sent to all our churches for their sessions to assist them (especially new elders).

Vote count: 6-0

6. That the Credentials Committee be instructed to develop a required reading list of materials on Presbyterianism and the office of elder for all candidates and interns, and that candidates and interns be thoroughly examined in the areas of their reading.

Vote count: 6-0

7. That all committees which report via the White Book record each vote of its recommendations, and that a brief explanatory note regarding any negative votes be provided.

Rationale: the ad hoc committee, through its interview process and survey, was confronted with several issues regarding the committee process such as inefficiency, lack of or too much trust in committee work and/or recommendations. The ad hoc committee recognizes that the presbytery cannot efficiently function as a “committee of the whole.” Presbytery must trust our committees until that trust is called into question, at which time presbytery should transparently and forthrightly deal with the trust/distrust factor. Until that time, if a committee is unanimous in a recommendation, the commissioners should accept their recommendation with little discussion. However, disagreement with a recommendation should not equal distrust; rather, it means disagreement. The recording of negative votes with an explanation allows the court to know the rationale of the committee, and negative votes alert the court to possible issues that need more evaluation. The court should be more comfortable in accepting a committee's recommendation with minimal questioning and discussion if it knows the rationale behind the committee's votes. However, there must be the freedom in the court to disagree and dissent. Members of committees who have disagreed with a recommendation should feel comfortable in doing so from the floor of presbytery.

Vote count: 6-0

III. Practical/Efficiency Matters

8. That PMV acknowledge that committee reports do not have to be opened or closed in prayer.

Vote count: 6-0

9. That moderators of presbytery be elected for one year, and alternate yearly between TEs and REs. This should help in making the meetings more efficient. Moderators who are more familiar with RRO and the BCO will aid the process of the meetings. This method will be reevaluated after one cycle of two years.

Vote count: 5-1

Reasoning: this change would stifle development of new moderators.

10. That the office of Parliamentarian be established to assist the Moderator and Stated Clerk in the rules of discussion. This person will be elected by the Presbytery every three years.

Vote count: 6-0

11. That the Stated Clerk inform all churches of the requirement of PMV's standing rule (Article III,G,1-2) that not only TEs but sessional representatives also must provide an excuse to presbytery concerning the rationale for their absence from a meeting of presbytery.

Vote count: 6-0

12. That the stated February meeting of PMV (for 3 years) be on the first Friday, commencing at 6 pm, and concluding at the end of its business Saturday. The committee would hope that this meeting could be hosted by Twin Lakes. There would be an emphasis on fellowship, instructing/preaching, and prayer, as well as presbytery's usual business. The theme of this first such meeting would be a 'fleshing out' of this ad hoc committee's findings and proposals. All REs in PMV would be encouraged to attend these meetings; however, only those appropriately commissioned by their sessions would be voting members.

Vote count: 6-0

13. That committee classes be for six(6) years with a year hiatus before serving on that same committee would be permitted.

Vote count: 6-0

14. That future budgets of PMV be amended to include an amount of \$5,000 for the benefit of PMV churches which request up to \$1,000 toward their expenses in sending REs to GA. This budgeted item could be funded through designated giving or at the discretion of the Administration Committee and be administered by it.

Vote count: 6-0

15. That this ad hoc committee remain in existence for three years in order to facilitate and assist the Stated Clerk in the implementation of these recommendations.

Vote count: 6-0

V. Other Considerations:

Although not germane to the purpose of this committee's work, there were other concerns the committee confronted. There seems to be a perceived need for a 'safe place' for our TEs to turn when they are struggling with various issues, both personally and ecclesiastically. Another realm of perceived need was some mechanism for PMV to provide a better measure of pastoral care for our churches. This seems consistent with the description of a presbytery's purview (see BCO 13-9g: "...in general, to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches under its care.").

16. That this committee explore these concerns and report back to PMV any further recommendations.

Vote count: 6-0

May Jesus Christ, the King and Head of His church be honored in all we do.